

The true story of Jack Webb

The names have not

Just the facts about the timid boy who grew up to set a new style in cops-and-robbers drama

My name's Zolotow. I'm a magazine writer. A while ago I flew to Hollywood. My assignment: to get the story of Jack Webb. Webb plays Friday, Sergeant Joe Friday, on the *Dragnet* program on television. He's an actor, one of the best, not only on television but anywhere you want an actor. He can make life real and vivid.

He's good. In fact, he's great. Maybe he's the most important talent developed in the new medium of television. This is his story. Just the facts. What you are about to read is true. The names have not been changed.

The time: 11:54 Saturday morning. A hot, heavy morning and the layer of smog made my eyes sting. I folded five sheets of white paper into quarters. I put the packet in my breast pocket, with a couple of newly-sharpened number 2 pencils and a fountain pen. I got into my rented coupe and drove maybe two miles up Coldwater Canyon in Beverly Hills. Then I turned right and wound for another mile along a twisted road until I went through a gate.

I was on the Webb estate—six acres of sloping terrain. I parked at the house, a one-story low-slung modernistic house. It's some house. It cost \$150,000. An architect's dream. Twelve rooms.

Nobody lived there mostly but Webb and a colored girl who did for him and a lazy basset hound. The hound's name is Dudley. Webb has an

ex-wife and two daughters. They don't live in the house. The Webbs are divorced. Mrs. Webb and the daughters live in the San Fernando Valley. (Jack doesn't live there any more, either. He sold the place. Too fancy and too big for a man with no time for anything but work.)

Webb was in the study when I arrived. The study is an enormous room big enough to be a house in itself. One wall is all glass. By the swimming pool. Dick Breen, the writer who wrote the screenplay of the new Warner Brothers movie, *Dragnet*, was going over the script with Jack's friend and adviser, Captain Jack Donohoe of the Los Angeles Police Department.

They sat at a long, modern oak table. There was a projection room for showing movies at one end of the study. A bar at the other. Breen and Donohoe were arguing whether two detectives grilling a suspect would give him a sandwich before or after grilling him.

Webb is a short man with big dark eyes, a salmon complexion, and jughandle ears. He has a good smile. He smiled and looked me over. He was wearing a polo shirt, cotton pants and a pair of deerskin slippers. He opened two bottles of German beer. I drank mine from a glass. He drank his right out of the bottle. Webb looked like a man who was too exhausted to rest or to sleep.

I found out that it is hard for Webb to sleep.

Webb is a stickler for accuracy, as Ann Robinson, his leading lady in the movie version of *Dragnet*, found out during long and painstaking rehearsals.

Late at night he lies down on a leather couch in his den. He stacks a dozen records on the turntable of his high-fidelity phonograph. Turns up the treble control. He listens to the syncopated sadness of Louie Armstrong playing *What Did I Do to Be So Black and Blue*, Bix Beiderbecke's recording of *Crying All Day*, and Duke Ellington's *Black and Tan Fantasy*. He tries to figure it out, listening to the music, drinking a bottle of beer.

Webb's day starts at half-past seven in the morning. It ends at eleven, twelve. This time of night the people who work on the program can forget about *Dragnet*. Not Webb. *Dragnet's* his baby. He can't put a brake on his mind. He's already worrying about next week's show and the week after that.

He has given up his life to an imaginary character named Friday. That's the way it is. He used to walk around the walled-in terrace back of the house. The moon was reflected in the swimming pool. It's a big pool. The water looked inviting. All the months he lived in this house he didn't have one swim in the pool. He was too busy. That's the way it is with him.

He can't stop. Once, when he was a kid of 12 or 13, he went on a roller-coaster ride at Venice Beach. He lost his nerve when the cars took that first breath-taking dive. But those machines keep going until the end of the ride. Jack Webb is in his job till the end of the ride.

It's got to be that way. Because Jack Webb feels a loyalty to the 40,000,000 men and women who watch *Dragnet*. Who believe in him, John Randolph Webb, 34 years old, actor. Does he save his marriage? Does he make a personal life for himself with his two children, with the girl he married? Does he throw *Dragnet* into a swimming pool and let it drown? Many times he's had the urge to chuck it all.

But you don't stop the roller-coaster. With him. It's the way it is with some people—failure is unendurable and success is bitter. Jack Webb doesn't know how to find peace. Money he's got. More than he ever dreamed possible. But money doesn't buy peace. It doesn't buy sleep.

He can't sleep and he listens to the old records, Louie's cracked voice singing "even the mouse ran from my house" and he searches for an answer. Searching. One way or another, that's what he's always been doing.

His mother, Maggie Smith Webb, once recalled: "Almost any time I looked out the window, my boy was looking in trash cans. Always searching for something. He didn't know what."

Maybe he'll find what he's been looking for all his life if he looks long enough, hard enough, and in the right places. He started searching when he

Jack and his ex-wife, Julie London, in the days before they faced the fact that their marriage wasn't working out. She was a promising movie starlet when he was in the Air Force.



been changed

BY MAURICE ZOLOTOW

was an infant. Searching for the meaning of his unknown father.

He was born in Santa Monica, California, on April 2, 1920. His mother is Roman Catholic, his father Jewish. All he knows about his father is that he was a hero in the first World War. His mother married him when he was still in uniform. It was a wartime romance. The child came along a year later. And when he was a year old, his mother and father split up. Divorced. From that day until this, nobody's heard from the father.

Maggie didn't mention him. And his son asked no questions. But a child can't help being scarred.

Jack knew he was different from other kids. He was always asking himself, "Why did it have to happen to me?" He never had a father to lean on, to go fishing with, to throw a ball to.

Mrs. Webb and the boy went to live with his grandmother in San Francisco. Grandfather had been a surveyor for the Santa Fe Railroad. He left Gram a lot of money and a 700-acre estate. But it all went. Fast. When Jack was three years old, they were up against it. They moved from San Francisco to Los Angeles.

They lived on the third floor of an apartment house on Third and Flower Streets, southwest of Main, on a steep hill. Apartment 339. Two rooms, one kitchen, no bath. The bathroom, shared by 12 tenants on the floor, was on the back porch. His mother helped run the building. Took an extra job as night cashier in a cafeteria.

The boy's heart would tighten watching Maggie. She was—and is—a fine, sensitive, educated woman, with deep emotions and an appreciation of art and literature. Life had dealt her a bad hand. Her son wanted to know why.

One Sunday, maybe he was four or five, they took a walk. She stopped in front of a department store. In a window there was a blank-faced manikin with a beautiful long dress on. Blue with pink ribbons, silky. Her eyes filled with tears.

Her son remembers squeezing her hand. "Some-day, Maggie," he said, "I'll buy you that dress. I swear I will."

Jack Webb kept that promise.

He was a thin child. All skin and bones. His jughandle ears stuck out worse than now. He had no friends to play games with. Stood on the sidelines, watching. A spectator, storing up impressions of humanity he's never forgotten. He dreaded going to school. He was always getting beat up.

Once, for his birthday, Maggie gave him a new white shirt and a pencil box. She was clerking in a store. She got the stuff at cost. He was proud of that shirt. He was coming home from school. A few blocks from home his path was blocked by Cap, an overgrown slob of a kid, twice Jack's size

Jack Webb is no cop. He's an actor. But millions of TV fans know him as Sergeant Joe Friday of the Los Angeles police force and will follow his realistic crime-bustin' in the full-length movie, *Dragnet*, inspired by the program that shows crime as it is.



and weight. He always wore a cap with the visor torn off and old campaign buttons stuck all over it.

"Where ya think you're going, shrimp?" he asked.

"Home," Webb said.

"Let's see the box," Cap said. He grabbed for Jack's shirt. Yanked it. Buttons flew off. Some of Cap's confederates rounded the corner just as Jack managed to free himself. They surrounded him. He was about seven years old. They grabbed his beautiful shiny fake-leather pencil case. They scattered the pencils and pens on the sidewalk. Punched his face and body. He thought, I am going to get killed. That's the way a kid's mind runs.

Then a strong arm in a blue sleeve reached into the fight. Pushed Cap and the other bullies away. He asked Webb who he was and where he lived. He picked up the pencils, pens, erasers and put them back in the case. He couldn't do much about the shirt. Jack doesn't remember his name, but that was the first cop he had any personal knowledge of.

A lot of kids think of a cop as a mortal enemy. To Jack this cop represented decency and justice. Maybe he also represented a symbol for the father he was always unconsciously seeking. Maybe what Webb has done in *Dragnet*, in paying tribute to the hard-working men of the police force, is his way of saying "thanks" to the cop who befriended a small boy 27 years ago.

Jack wasn't a healthy kid. Always coming down with one disease or another. Seemed to have a cold the year round. He got caught in a rain-storm once. Nobody was home and he sat around in his wet clothes until grandma came. He had a bad chill.

They had a small tin tub in their kitchen. She boiled water on the stove. Filled the tub so the steam rose. She dunked him in the steaming water but the shivering wouldn't go away. She took his temperature. 103.

By morning it was 105. They called the doctor. He said Jack had pneu- (Continued on page 21)

THE NAMES HAVE NOT BEEN CHANGED

(Continued from page 5)



Jack used to live in an architect's dream house that cost \$150,000, with his collection of jazz records and a sad-eyed basset hound with the name of Dudley.

monia." He wanted to send for the ambulance. Maggie and Gram said they would nurse him at home. He was pretty close to death. They pulled him through.

But something remained. A sickness in his chest. They called it chronic bronchitis. Then it changed to asthma. It meant he might choke to death any time he got an attack. It meant he had to avoid any exertion. It was another barrier be-

tween him and other kids in his neighborhood.

He suffered from asthma from about the age of eight until he was 17. Often he woke up in the middle of the night frantic because he was unable to suck in a single gulp of life-giving air. He always carried a box with green powder in it. He had to inhale the fumes when he felt himself choking. He didn't know the name of the chemical. Just the color—green. He lived on a special diet. No milk, cheese, eggs or bread.

Just walking up three flights of stairs to the family's flat nearly killed him. Sometimes Maggie or Gram had to carry him upstairs in their arms.

It was about this time that Jack discovered books. Those in the public library were free. He began to live in an imaginary world. The world of Jim Hawkins and Squire Trelawney and Long John Silver on Treasure Island. He helped Robinson Crusoe through his lonely years as a castaway. He captured big game in Africa with Carl Akeley, Martin Johnson and Frank Buck. He lived the aerial battles of World War I with Eddie Rickenbacker and his "hat in the ring" squadron. Reading was his substitute for life.

Jack had other substitutes for living, too. One was exploring in the trash cans in the rear of the apartment houses in his neighborhood. Like his mother remembers, he was always searching for something. Carrying home bits and pieces. A conch shell you heard the ocean in if you put your ear to it. A red pennant, "Souvenir of Lake Tahoe." A broken billiard cue. A tennis racket without strings. Italian Chianti bottles in straw holders.

Once he found the stub of a crayon. He started drawing on brown-paper bags. Faces of people. Railroad tracks. Houses. Animals. Anything he could see or imagine.

Maggie bought him a set of crayons and some

tracing paper. He traced pictures out of magazines and colored them. Now when he looked out the window he didn't have to feel sorry for himself. He began to draw the teeming life outside.

A lot goes into the making of an actor. One thing is to be able to observe other people with sympathy. Maybe Webb should be grateful to the asthma. It forced him to be a spectator. Sympathy for others in trouble came naturally because of his own troubles.

His last substitute for living was music. Jazz music. He found it through a broken-down horn man who lived in a little furnished room on the second floor front. He had been a solid sender once. Played in the brass sections of good bands. Now he was a drunk. He had a wind-up phonograph and a beat-up cornet. He played cornet for Jack. Let him hold it sometimes. Also played his records. That's the first time Webb heard Bix Beiderbecke's cornet—poignant, plaintive, speaking of the yearning and loneliness that filled him.

The horn-man was thrown out of his place. He couldn't pay the rent. He left the boy one record, a record Bix made in 1930—*At the Jazz Band Ball*. Today, Webb has a complete collection of every record Bix made. And just as he has brought the actuality of a policeman's work to the American public, he has a burning desire to do the same for the hot jazz musicians. Someday he'll do it.

When Jack Webb entered high school, he thought he was going to be a musician or an artist someday. But a lot of things happened in high school, a lot of things that changed his life.

In next week's instalment Mr. Zolotow tells how Jack Webb passed up a chance to inherit a prosperous plumbing business, and a scholarship that might have led to a career as an artist, to hang around radio studios and pick up many of the tricks at which he later became a master.

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Webb believes so strongly in realism that he practically reproduced the Los Angeles police headquarters for his TV program.

Just the facts about the timid boy who looked at life from the sidelines and found a new way to tell crime stories

The true story of Jack Webb

The names have not been changed

BY MAURICE ZOLOTOW

Jack Webb, the creator of "Dragnet" and Sergeant Joe Friday, was born in Santa Monica, California, 34 years ago. As a youngster he had a rough time of it. His parents were divorced and his mother had to work hard to get the bare necessities for herself and her son. He was a weak and sickly boy who became a spectator of rather than a participant in life. He read a lot of books and taught himself to draw and, because of his own troubles, developed a deep sympathy for other unfortunates. He didn't know it at the time, but he was learning things that eventually made him an able actor and a sensitive director.

PART II

Webb shoots the episodes of *Dragnet* on soundstage eleven at the Walt Disney studios in Burbank. He rents it on a yearly basis. Inside this enormous room is an exact replica of the lower floor of the Los Angeles Police Department at City Hall. Room for room, filing cabinet for filing cabinet, locks and handles on the door.

The phones have the same extension numbers. The calendars are alike. He wanted to reproduce the old-fashioned knobs on the doors. But the firm manufacturing them had gone out of business 20 years ago. So he had a plaster cast made of each knob at police headquarters and duplicated it down to the last screw.

A local detective visited the set once. He watched them shoot a scene in the squad room. They took a five-minute break for coffee. He sauntered over. Walked around the set.

"Sure feels like home," he muttered to himself. "And over there—I'll be darned—why, that's my desk—and those are my cigar butts!"

There's a reason for Webb's insistence on realism in the smallest detail. An audience, watching the scene in the squad room, can't see the extension number on a phone cradle. And even if you did, how would you know it was identical with its twin downtown?

But the actors know!

They give a more honest and convincing per-

formance, Webb believes, when the setting is authentic. They have to act up to it.

He didn't know it then, but all the elements that made *Dragnet* possible were part of him before he was 16. Because of the asthma, he was compelled to become an observer of life rather than a participant. Because his family lived at the bottom of things, because they didn't always have enough to eat, he learned to understand the lives of poor people.

He used to cut out covers of the *National Geographic* in the shape of soles and stick them in his shoes. Bring the brown and green coupons to the store for food during the depression.

You don't learn about slums and crime and juvenile delinquency by reading a lot of books or going to college. You have to be there. You have to have lived it and felt it. Webb was there. He lived it. That's about the size of it.

Also, as I told you, he became interested in art when he was 10 or 11. He tried to paint exactly what he saw because his idols were the magazine realists, like Norman Rockwell and Stevan Dohanos. They pictured life as they saw it. Yet they were not impersonal cameras, coldly recording, leaving out the human values.

They selected and heightened. Strove for composition and balance and perspective. From their illustrations Webb learned how to use artistic technique to heighten realism.

Exactly what he does in *Dragnet*.

You think the connection is far-fetched? It isn't. Television is a pictorial medium. Movies, too. The director—Webb directed the full-length *Dragnet* movie and all the radio and television episodes—is an artist. He uses a camera instead of a brush and paint. Instead of a square of canvas, he works on a 15-foot (Continued on page 20)



Jack was so busy as director and star of his full-length movie, *Dragnet*, that he checked his mail while being made up.

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(Continued from page 18)

movie screen or a 21-inch TV screen. Both are stages for moving pictures. Never forget the word pictures. Webb hasn't.

Two more experiences were necessary to his growth. To discover the excitement of acting. And to learn he could be liked as a human being by a stranger. The second thing happened like this:

He was about 15. A friend of his, Roy Knight, picked up a beat-up Ford roadster, '29 vintage, for \$50. He started teaching Webb to drive. They parked on a residential street in North Hollywood so he wouldn't tie up traffic while learning how to maneuver the jalopy.

Jack was getting ready to pull out of a parking space. Instead of shifting into first, he slipped into reverse. Slammed his foot down on the accelerator. He slammed into a brand-new gray LaSalle, parked behind him.

The crash brought the owner out. He was a big handsome blonde guy.

"What's the big idea?" he shouted.

"Gosh," Webb said, "I'm awful sorry."

"Can't you drive a car, young man?"

"Well—uh—not yet. I'm learning."

The man puffed his cigar. "You'll have to pay for the damage," he said.

"I want to do that," Webb said, "but I don't know how. I have no money. My folks are kind of hard up. Fact is, I'm going to Belmont High. All I make is 30 cents a day, washing dishes in the school cafeteria. I could give you that, sir."

The man chuckled. He sized up the bashed-in fender. "Take you about 10 years at that rate," he said. "Now maybe you'd like to come and work for me. I'm in the plumbing supply business. Got a store over on Melrose Avenue."

"I'd be glad to do that," said Webb. "I'll work for you until I work it off."

The man shook his head. "Nobody works for me for nothing," he said. "Tell you what. You come after school and Saturdays. I'll pay you \$20 a week and deduct five for the damages."

That was Jack's first real job. More important, he found his first real guide and ideal, a father-substitute. An older man he

could respect and look up to. An honest, decent, upright human being. The man's name is Ted Lederer.

Webb started out sweeping the store, straightening up. Then as he learned about pipe dimensions, L fittings, T fittings, porcelain tubs, copper tubing, he began taking orders on the phone.

After he'd been working there a year, Mr. Lederer said, "Jack, I don't have a son. I guess I feel closer to you than any boy I've ever known. I hope you will consider staying on here permanently. Some day this could all be yours."

Jack thought it over. He decided the plumbing business wasn't his dish. He was already getting the acting bug.

It started with his going to radio broadcasts. He'd hang around the NBC studios at Sunset and Gower and the CBS studios at Sunset and Vine. Join the mob drifting in to be a studio audience.

All comedians had to have studio audiences off which to bounce their gags. Jack was a regular at the broadcasts of Jack Benny, Al Pearce, Ed Wynn, Burns & Allen, Edgar Bergen, Bob Hope.

He not only had a photographic eye. He also had a phonographic ear.

One afternoon, during a "clambake" in an ice-cream parlor near school, he was showing off to some of his high school cronies by doing impressions. He drawled like Benny, nasalized like Fred Allen, shrieked falsetto like Wynn, rasped like Burns, rapid-fire gagged like Hope.

The crowd broke up to go their various ways. Art Pugh, the student manager of the football team, walked alongside Webb. He said the team needed some equipment and uniforms. The athletic department didn't have the money in the budget. Would Webb put on a show to raise funds?

Would a fish like water?

He had seen so many radio shows that he knew all the mannerisms of the comedians. He not only put on the show—he wrote it, directed it, emceed it. He got the material by just remembering broadcasts he'd heard.



Webb, shown here rehearsing a scene for the movie, made the jump from TV to films without a hitch. The way he figures things, they're both screens on which pictures tell a story.

The first show he did was in the school auditorium. They used live mikes and a p.a. system. The stage was set to resemble a radio studio. They had a 12-piece jazz band. He was still a hot jazz buff. The band copied the arrangements used by Benny Goodman, the Dorsey brothers, Glen Gray and the Casa Lomans.

Jack and his fellow actors copied the gags of Hope and Benny. He would start out by asking, "How many saw the Jack Benny show last week?" If too many hands went up, he quickly switched to his Ed Wynn or Bob Hope material.

The show raised plenty of money. They did more of them. Also a dramatic presentation, *Fie on You, Rassendale*. The play was so sad they printed the programs on paper towels so you could cry into them. Jack wrote the play. He also portrayed Renfrew of the Mounted, the hero. Renfrew was a villain who turned out to be a hero. Webb remembers some of the dialogue. In one scene, he opened his coat and cried, "I am Renfrew of the Mounted."

The heroine clutched her bosom. "Alas, poor me," she moaned, "then all is lost."

"That's where you're wrong, baby," he said, yanking off his moustache disguise. "that's where you're plenty wrong." Then he embraced her.

You can see that Webb had a long way to go before he learned how to use the

rhythms of conversational dialogue, how to create a believable character like Sergeant Friday. He didn't care then. He was going to be a magazine illustrator, anyway.

Miss Lola Holton was his art teacher in high school. She guided his progress from term to term. A few months before graduation, she asked him to her office. On her desk was a folder of water colors he had finished that term.

"I have wonderful news, Jack," she told him. "I have been able to get you a scholarship at the University of Southern California and the Chouinard School of Art. Now, you'll be able to continue your studies and perfect your technique. I know you have a brilliant future ahead of you, Jack."

He was overwhelmed. He was treading on clouds. Talking out loud as he went home, he said: "Move over Norman Rockwell. Here comes another big shot artist."

But before the day ended, Jack Webb completely changed his mind. It was one of the most important decisions in his life. And the hardest.

Next week, Mr. Zolotow tells how the rusty plumbing in Jack's tenement home changed his mind about becoming an artist and how what seemed like an equally trivial happening, a tipped-over glass in a five joint, led to romance and marriage.



Ben Alexander, Ann Robinson and Webb on the *Dragnet* set—a far cry from the days when Jack wrote, directed and acted in school plays in which he was a hit because of his ability to mimic top radio comics.



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The true
The names

BY MAURICE ZOLOTOW

Jack Webb, creator of "Dragnet" and Sergeant Joe Friday, was born in Santa Monica, California, 34 years ago. He was the shy and sickly child of divorced parents. His mother worked hard to give them the bare necessities. His illness made him a spectator of, rather than a participant, in life. He read a lot, drew pictures, developed a keen understanding of other people in trouble. As a high school boy he hung around radio studios, found he had a photographic eye and a phonographic ear for the mannerisms and voices of the stars. He imitated them in school shows but gave up all ideas of a radio career the day his art teacher told him he'd won two scholarships to study art.

PART III

He almost ran up the hill on Flower Street. The same hill his mother or grandmother had to carry him up only yesterday. Yes, he was going to be a famous American artist. He was going to put down the world around him in form and color. His student work had brought him two scholarships.

They were still living in the dilapidated St. Regis apartments. It was the same mostly. All that changed was the tenants didn't have to make home-brew or bathtub gin. They could buy real gin at a liquor store. But the kids still had holes in their shoes and patches on their pants.

The people were still on relief. Instead of a depression, they had a recession. The drunks who slept in the hallways didn't sleep off canned-heat jags. Now they were winos. Drank themselves blind and sick on cheap port, sherry, muscatel, alcoholic content 19 per cent by volume. The neighborhood was still full of misery and broken homes.

But that wasn't how it looked to Jack Webb's eyes that afternoon. No. He was John Randolph Webb, magazine artist, studio on a cliff at Pacific Palisades, beautiful models posing therein, north light, covers on the national magazines. His head was in the stars.

He bounded up the stairs. On the second floor, a hot argument was going on. One of the voices was familiar. Maggie's. His mother's. He walked down the hallway. The walls reeked with a special smell that all slum tenements seem to possess. A smell that's hung in the air so long it's soaked into the plaster.

He said, "Hello, Maggie."

That broke up the dispute. The tenant was a thin, prematurely aged woman. Six children, two infants.

"What she want?" asked Jack as they walked upstairs.

Maggie shrugged. "Something about the water," she said, sighing wearily. "The pipes are rusty or something. The water comes out rusty, she says. She won't pay the rent till it gets fixed."

They entered the two-room flat. Maggie and gram slept in the bedroom. He slept on a couch in the living room. The kitchen was two by three. Maggie unwrapped some bundles. Made dinner. Meat balls and spaghetti. Chopped meat, 20 cents a pound, at the chain store around the corner. Mostly suet.

"Come on," Maggie said, "it's ready."

story of Jack Webb

have not been changed

Just the facts about the shy and sickly boy who learned about life the hard way and set a new style in cops-and-robbers drama

"I'm not hungry," Webb said.

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing. Nothing much. Think I'll walk around. Pick up a sandwich somewhere. Think I'll go out."

"You sure you're all right?" His mother looked at him suspiciously.

"Yeah," he said, "I'm all right. I'm fine."

He walked for hours. Walked to Hollywood Boulevard, then headed west toward Hollywood. Didn't see the faces of the crowd. Just saw one face. Maggie's. Tired, harrassed. Weary unto death. He turned on Ivar Street, headed north. Walked for miles. Finally sat on a bench and looked at the hills looming up north. He looked at

the gigantic electric-light cross on the highest hill. It's been there ever since anyone can remember. He said a prayer. He knew what he had to do. He had to get his mother out of that situation. They had to move. He took the letters telling about the scholarships out of his pocket.

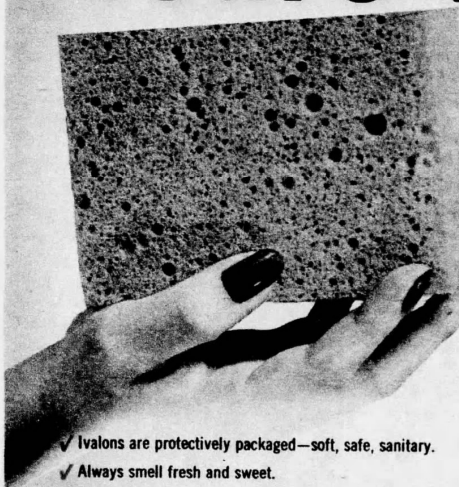
He tore them up. Threw the pieces into the wind. He never mentioned the scholarships to Maggie. He came home and packed all his paintings and art materials into a carton. Tied it up. Next morning he started looking through the help wanted advertisements.

Jack was in the high school class that graduated in February 1938. He could have gone back to Mr. Lederer's (Continued on following page)



Jack Webb and Julie London — The first time they met she called him a "clumsy thing" but they were soon seeing a lot of each other, holding hands, falling in love.

GENUINE IVALON 29¢ BATH SPONGE Yours for Only a Nickel!



Buy an IVALON household sponge at its regular price . . . and get a 29¢ IVALON face and bath sponge for only a nickel. You'll marvel how tough IVALONS are on soot, soil and dirt—out-wearing, out-lasting and out-cleaning other sponges. Look for IVALON's Big 5¢ sponge pack. Buy IVALONS and SAVE.



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- ✓ An exclusive product of Ivano, Inc., Chicago 5, Illinois.

At Food and Variety Stores

IVALON

Miracle Sponge of 1001 Household Uses



Every scene in the full-length movie, *Dragnet*, got Jack Webb's personal attention.

plumbing supplies business. He didn't. He didn't want to get into a set-up that was too permanent. He got a job as delivery boy in Silverwood's. Salary, \$8 weekly, opportunity for advancement for bright young man willing to do everything.

He was plenty energetic, not so willing. He delivered flat boxes containing suits. Silverwood's is a high-class chain of clothing and haberdashery stores. Branches all over Los Angeles. He started in the Wilshire Boulevard store, later worked at the Hollywood store, then the downtown store, then they moved

Nice job in a restaurant. Cashier. No more taking guff from tenants, sweeping hallways.

Jack wasn't a good salesman. You've got to believe that each sale is of the utmost importance to be a good salesman. He didn't. But he got by.

He learned how to appraise the character of a strange customer in a flash. See if he was the type who would go for the hand-painted \$10 tie or if he was strictly a \$1.50 navy blue polka-dot character.

The big coup in men's wear retailing is when a customer walks in for a handkerchief—and winds up

THE NAMES HAVE NOT BEEN CHANGED

(Continued from preceding page)

him to the University store at Westwood.

Opportunity for advancement. He advanced to wrapper, checker, phone order taker, finally salesman. Yeah, John R. Webb, artist, was selling shirts and shorts, ties and socks. He hated it. He wasn't cut out to be a salesman. But he was making a salary, \$125 a month plus commissions.

They moved to a clean, sunny place. Maggie still worked, but regular hours.

Cashier. No more taking

with a suit of clothes. Webb didn't have the knack of parlaying a dollar necktie sale into a suit of clothes like other salesmen did. But he improved. Once in a while a man would come in for a tie and he would hypnotize him into buying a suit, hat, shoes, socks, shirts. The works.

He finally wound up as assistant manager of the University store near the campus of the college he had once hoped to attend. Salary, \$300 a month. The routine bored him. Standing on his feet from 9 to 5 five days a week, and from 9 to 9 on Saturdays wasn't his idea of the good life.

He never could persuade customers out of their convictions. Every year at Silverwood's they ran a dollar day. All the merchandise was drastically reduced. A woman had bought a \$20 all-wool bathrobe for \$4. She brought it in. None of the sale merchandise was returnable. All sales final. No returns or exchanges. She wanted her \$4 back. She said the robe had a streak. She showed Jack the streak.

"Madam," he said, "what did you expect for \$4. You have bought this for \$8 less than we paid for it. You should be very happy. Nobody will notice the streak anyhow."

"It's no good," she said, "it's damaged."

He signed the credit slip. Some assistant manager!

After working hours he took courses in radio acting and radio announcing at the Los Angeles Junior

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"Being so busy, it's important to do our dishes the modern, timesaving way—to let them dry without wiping. I find TREND lets even the glassware dry clean

and shining without streaks. And there's no soap scum left in our sinks!

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"My experience is that TREND is as fine a dishwashing product as you can buy. Yet it costs substantially less than other leading brands. That makes it by far the best value. It's only sensible to buy TREND and save money."

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GERTRUDE AUSTIN, Director of Consumer Service for Sunkist Growers, is a widely known author and lecturer on nutrition, tests hundreds of recipes each year in the famous Sunkist Kitchen.

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College. In such spare time as was left he joined a group of actors. They put on amateur productions of Broadway plays in a small theater—actually a converted residence—on Beverly Boulevard. He always played villains. Because he had a sallow, evil-looking face. The actors had to bludgeon their friends to get an audience.

The war was on. Jack got tired of waiting for his draft number to show. He enlisted in the Army Air Corps. While waiting for acceptance he got a job at the Byron Jackson steel mill. This friend of his, Roy Knight, the one who gave him driving lessons, said, "Let's get jobs on the night shift. Then we'll have time to go to the beach afternoons and romance girls. We'll have a million laughs."

But they missed the laughs. They worked from four a. m. until noon. By the time they knocked off, they were bushed. They didn't want to go to the beach. They wanted to sleep. The Jackson company made an anti-recoil anti-tank gun. Webb operated an electric handsaw. Chopped six-foot steel ingots into small pieces. The plant was a nightmare of noises. He never went to the beach. He couldn't sleep either. Couldn't get the factory noise out of his head. But he made \$100 a week.

Maggie had taken a job at Lockheed. Grandmother had gone blind. They lived in a \$28-a-month apartment on Marathon Street in Hollywood. It was luxury. They ate meat or chicken almost every night.

Webb started hanging around at those late-evening jam sessions in the jazz joints. Listening to those saxophones moan and the trumpets play intricate figures on standards like *Way Down Yonder in New Orleans* or *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*. The music muffled the echoes of those riveting machines banging in his brain all the time. He couldn't get enough of jazz. Even went to Sunday afternoon jam sessions.

At one of those Sunday sessions, at a joint on La Cienega near Pico Boulevard, he was digging some real solid jive. Swinging his arms around. Beating time. Something crashed at the next table. He had knocked over a drink. It wasn't whisky or gin. Just a soft drink.

"Gee, you're a clumsy thing," the owner of the drink said. Jack looked around. Into the most beautiful face he'd ever seen. Big dark eyes and sort of reddish blond hair. A figure that made you want to turn cartwheels in the street. He bought her a fresh drink.

The girl's name was Julie London. She was only 16 years old, seven years less than Webb. She wanted to be an actress. She was almost as crazy about jazz as he was. They saw a lot of each other in the next few weeks. They listened to a lot of jazz. They held a lot of hands. They kissed each other.

Then he got his army orders. Went to a camp at Fresno for four months of basic training. Then to Camp St. Cloud at Collegeville, Minnesota, for six months of preflight training. He wanted to be a pilot.

At St. Cloud he did two shows, both called *Flying High*, to raise money for the USO headquarters. He wrote, directed and emceed the shows.

Then he was assigned to an air base at Tulare for flight training. He soloed in a Stearman biplane, an old navy recon job. He was assigned to Laughlin Field at Del Rio, Texas.

The fellows were sitting around the barracks one night. One of them was leafing through a magazine. He suddenly whistled. Real loud. Like a siren.

"Hey," he shouted, "get a load of this."

They crowded around. He was pointing to a full-page photograph of a girl. A movie starlet.

While they drooled, Webb read the caption. It was his girlfriend, Julie London.

"I sure would like to meet her," one of the boys said.

"Any time you come to Los Angeles," Webb said, very off-hand, "you just look me up and I'll arrange it. I know this dreamboat very well."

"Why don't you stop talking to yourself, man? Who yuh kidding?"

Soon they were making bets. He wrote Julie a letter and asked her to answer it and vindicate him. She wrote him a long letter. He wrote her a long letter. They started writing long letters back and forth.

After the war, Webb headed for San Francisco. The United Nations were about to convene. He heard that the radio stations were desperately short of personnel. He figured maybe he could latch on somewhere as a radio announcer. He was really on his way, but he didn't know it then. ◀ ◀

Next week's concluding instalment brings the Jack Webb story up to date. It tells of his early career in radio, his marriage to Julie London and why that broke up, how Jack finally created "Dragnet," and how he feels about the success that the show has brought him.

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The true story of Jack Webb

The names have not been changed

Just the facts about the man who created "Dragnet"—only to find it's a monster that rules his life

BY MAURICE ZOLOTOW

Jack Webb, creator of "Dragnet" and Sergeant Joe Friday, was born in Santa Monica, California, 34 years ago. He was the shy and sickly child of divorced parents. His illness made him a spectator, rather than a participant, in life and he developed a keen understanding of people in trouble. As a high school boy he found he had a knack for mimicking the radio stars and also had a talent for art. But he gave up the idea of a career in art to take a series of jobs that helped him support his mother. Shortly after he met pretty Julie London and fell in love with her, he enlisted in the Air Corps where, in addition to his military duties, he produced shows. When he was discharged, he headed for San Francisco, hoping to land a radio job covering the UN.

PART IV

Webb didn't know it then but that one way ticket to San Francisco was a ticket to the fastest roller-coaster ride a guy ever had. He figured to find a place in radio as an announcer. Maybe, eventually, as a news commentator.

From all over the world, the United Nations delegates were pouring into San Francisco. Jack knocked on the doors of all the stations. He claimed to be a well-known free-lance announcer from Los Angeles. Said he had worked at KEHÉ. Didn't say his work was filing transcriptions and checking scripts. For a salary of zero. Just for the experience.

Finally KGO, of the American Broadcasting Company, bought his fairy tale. He was put on the staff for \$50 a week. He held a stopwatch on the newscasters from New York and Washington, all the big names covering the UN sessions. The only time he spoke on the air it was to introduce commentators like H. V. Kaltenborn and Walter Winchell. Got them on and off. Did station breaks.

But he was learning all the time, learning technique. He palled around with Lee Gisoux, an ABC sports announcer. Gisoux showed him a few tricks. He introduced him to sound engineers. Webb asked questions all the time. Found out how to place a mike, how to get a balance between many voices, how sound effects are created, what made an actor's dialogue sound real. For hours, he tried out what he learned on dead mikes in empty studios. Learned to express every emotion by shading the pitch of his voice.

He couldn't sleep. He hung around the continuity department. Read old scripts. Played over transcriptions, played music bridges. Watched how the illusion of reality could be created entirely by a blend of voices, sound effects and music. How, with the proper suggestions, the listener at home could create in his mind's eye a complete stage set.

When the problems of world peace had been settled forever, it looked like KGO was going to tie a can to his tail. He ran into an ABC continuity

writer, Jim Moser, who was plenty worried too. Between them they cooked up a weekly show. It dramatized the biggest news event of the week. The cast was Webb. Webb mimicked all the voices. He was Roosevelt, Stalin, Churchill, Taft, Molotov, Eisenhower. He was still an amateur at the game. The critics said, "Webb is a man with a hundred voices—and they all sound alike." After 13 weeks he got the hook.

But he wasn't discouraged. He conned KGO into giving him a one-hour audience participation show in the daytime. It laid an egg.

He was a little desperate now. Anytime he walked into the office of the KGO executives with a new idea, they flinched. He knew a lot about jazz. He said, "Put me on in the morning with a disc jockey show." They said O.K. No other announcer cared to wake up at 5 in the morning.

The show was on from 6 to 7. Title: *The Coffee Club*. He played discs from his collection—Ellington, Louie, Smack Henderson, Red Nichols, Bix, King Oliver. Real off-beat stuff. Turned out nobody wanted to hear *I'm a Ding Dong Daddy from Duma* at 6 a. m.

Then Dick Breen came into his life. Breen is an Irishman with a sarcastic sense of humor and a gift for spinning out honest dialogue so the paper it's written on crackles with life. Breen was a New York radio writer. He came to KGO in 1946 to juice up some local shows. Breen didn't have a place to bunk. Webb's place was convenient. He moved in.

They never went to sleep. Just cut up touches all night long. Breen spouting ideas. Webb listening and spilling out his ideas. How to improve radio. They traded a lot of ideas. A month later, KGO had an empty half-hour on Sunday. They asked Breen to create something. He came up with a dramatic series—*Pat Novak for Hire*. Novak was a hard-boiled, hard-hitting guy who got involved in cases of murder, conspiracy, dope smuggling, arson and extortion. By profession, Novak was a fishing party guide.

Webb played Novak. The first line Webb ever spoke as a star was: "My name's Pat Novak. I rent boats and I do anything else that goes with a weak will and a strong stomach."



Jack Webb—He hoped success would give him a chance to save his marriage to Julie London. But *Dragnet* only drove her further away.

The show was an instant success. They acquired a sponsor. The fan mail poured in. The reviews were great. This time they ran 26 weeks. Then Breen got an offer to write a movie for Warner Brothers. He left town.

A week later, Webb followed Breen to Los Angeles. He didn't have a cent in the world or a prospect of a job.

The first thing he did was pick up Julie London in a beat-up convertible he had bought on time. They drove to Las Vegas and were married. He was still unemployed. She was making a movie for an independent producer.

The friction started in the first year of their marriage. Being out of work, he was naturally restless and bitter. He picked on her. She picked back. When something is basically wrong, a man and a woman find trivial excuses to bicker. It's that way with any couple. Julie didn't want



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**At Food and
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to be just a housewife. Webb didn't blame her. She was—and is—beautiful, talented, ambitious. She didn't want to give it all up for a maybe. Every few months they'd have a quarrel so violent he'd leave home. Then their need for each other drew them together again.

He was sure that if he ever clicked, the marriage would work. How wrong can you be? Sometimes success makes it harder.

After a while, he picked up steady jobs on network drama shows. He had a big-time agent, George Rosenberg.

What he knows about acting he learned from radio. No body, no face, no arms in radio. You've got to tell your story with your voice. You don't have to hit people over the head to arouse their emotions. That's why he plays Sergeant Friday in a low register. For the other characters on *Dragnet* he likes to hire radio actors.

Television is—and always will be—a small-screen medium. He started watching it on a 10-inch screen. Even today, 50 per cent of the audience is still seeing the shows from a 12-inch screen. They want to see faces, close-ups. That's how he plays, directs and cuts *Dragnet*. Quick cuts from one close-up to the next close-up. All action on television really takes place from the neck up.

He tried to get a radio show of his own. He did a reprise of the Pat Novak idea. Now it was called *Johnny Madero—Pier 23*. On KHJ. It was bounced after 26 weeks.

Nobody ever did anything for his career except himself. He found all the radio jobs himself. He kept trying to get in the movies. They said he didn't have the experience. He found out you can't be dependent on anybody. Between radio jobs, he told his story to casting directors. Owen McClain, casting director of Eagle Lion, gave him a part in a melodrama, *Hollow Triumph*. The part was right for him. Other producers liked it. Soon he had jobs in pictures. He played the assistant director in *Sunset Boulevard*, a paraplegic veteran in *The Men*, and Lieutenant Lee of the Los Angeles Crime Laboratory in *He Walked by Night*.

In every life there's one big break. The part of Lieutenant Lee was the break for Webb. He was in three crucial scenes. Detectives brought him bullets and fingerprints to identify. He talked about lams, grooves, striations.

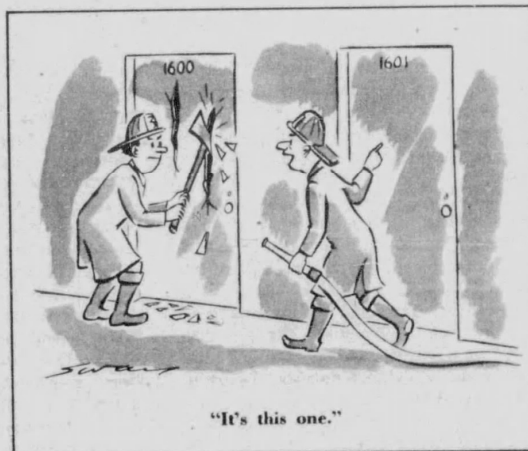
But that wasn't the break. The break was Sergeant Marty Wynn, a real-life detective.

Since *He Walked by Night* was a documentary movie showing how the Los Angeles police solve the murder of a highway patrolman, the department assigned Wynn to the set to act as technical advisor. Webb had a lot of time on his hands. He began sitting around the commissary with Wynn. Wynn often beefed about the ridiculousness of the crime programs on radio.

"It makes every cop in the country laugh," he told Webb, "when they hear this nonsense on radio. Why doesn't somebody ever show how detectives really break a crime."

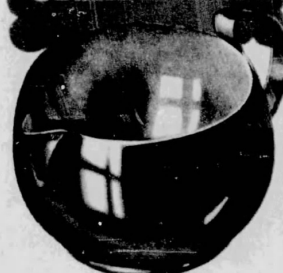
It was strictly conversation. Wynn forgot it. Webb didn't. A month later, Julie and he had another fight. He was between jobs. He moved into a hotel room. He had plenty of time to think.

He telephoned Wynn. Wynn fixed it for him to attend classes at the Police Academy and study criminal law, methods of detection, rules of evidence. Then, with the permission of the department, he joined Wynn and his partner, Vance Brasher, in their police car. Night after night, he listened to calls over the police signal. Followed them as they worked. (Continued on following page)



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THE NAMES HAVE NOT BEEN CHANGED

(Continued from preceding page)

Studied their patience, their calmness, their pity for the men and women caught in some tragic situation.

He found out crime in a big city is not grand and awesome—it's not a multi-million dollar syndicate with an international brain masterminding it. It is petty and mean and heartbreaking. It is not a million dollar theft from a bank, usually, but a two dollar heist from a candy store. Crime is not something elegant and mysterious. It is not lived out in luxurious penthouses with well-stacked blondes hovering around. It is tawdry, sordid. It arises out of human misery and insecurity.

Now he knew what he had to do. But it was only an idea. His agent said he was wasting his time. The public would be bored by tedious recitations of real-life crime, authentic descriptions of police work. Besides, people would sue for libel. He went to CBS. They said to forget about it. Audiences wanted the Sam Spade type of crime program. Hit them in the belly. Smash them in the face. Wrestle with the blonde. Gulp a slug of whiskey. The police are thick-wits. Only a private eye can solve a crime.

Webb tried to tell them police detectives were not morons. That all crimes were not solved by private-eyes. He said detectives were intelligent, hard-working, sympathetic men. They understood life, they understood criminals. He could just as well have told the empty air.

Then he got another break. NBC and CBS were in a titanic struggle. William Paley, the head man of CBS, had raided NBC. Jack Benny, Edgar Bergen, Burns and Allen, Amos 'n' Andy—all had gone over to CBS. NBC had a lot of empty spaces on the program sheet. Suddenly, his ridiculous idea began to look better. Especially to Homer Canfield, Pacific Coast director of the NBC network. He gave Webb the go-ahead.

Now Webb practically moved in with Brasher and Wynn. Soon after they were ready with the audition. They recorded a 30-minute show. Went down to City Hall and played it for Joseph F. Reid, deputy chief of police. He said it was good and it was accurate. Webb said it was good *because* it was accurate.

They still didn't have a title for the show. He was having a hamburger and a beer in the kitchen of Herb Ellis. Ellis is an actor. Webb was still brooding about a title. Ellis was flipping the patties over.

"Jack," he asked, "what do they call it when the police go all out to catch a crook?"

"Let's see," Webb said, mulling it over. "They . . . they put out a dragnet. That's it. That's what I'll call the show."

By the fourth show, Jim Moser, his old San Francisco sidekick, was writing the scripts. Jim and Webb hammered out the style of *Dragnet*. By the 10th show, they had the famous dum-de-dum-dum theme. Walter Schuman, the band-leader, composed it. He tried a hundred different themes until he came up with something Webb liked.



Webb is afraid he may go stale doing too much *Dragnet*. So he's working up another show about a jazz musician. He knows a lot about jazz. He used to be a disc jockey.

Webb invented the opening line of the show: "The story you are about to hear is true. Only the names have been changed to protect the innocent."

Webb is not a cop. He has no interest in being a cop. When he takes off his gun and badge, he leaves Sergeant Friday in the dressing room. He is an actor, an actor playing the role of a detective. What he has done is try to be truthful about a detective's work. He doesn't use make-up. He reproduces exactly what a detective's office looks like. He sends his cameraman out to shoot actual interiors of slum apartments, to capture the feel and movement of Los Angeles.

Every case on *Dragnet* is a genuine case. In many instances, the dialogue is taken verbatim from the criminal's confession or from a detective's report. Many are minor crimes. But a \$6 theft can have more human interest than a \$100,000 embezzlement.

Joe Friday and his partner, Frank Smith (played by Ben Alexander), solve crimes the way the hard-working men in every police department in the country solve crimes. By using their brains. By drawing on their past experience with similar crimes and similar criminals. Most of all, by walking around and asking a lot of people a lot of questions.

At all times Webb has at least one member of the police force, who is off duty, as a technical advisor on the script. These men receive a salary. Each week, *Dragnet* pays a substantial sum into a fund run by the Policemen's Benevolent Association. It is paid to the widows and orphans of policemen killed in the course of duty.

Dragnet went on radio in the middle of 1949. It was an instant hit. Two years later Webb was ready to jump into television. Despite all the smart opinions, the public liked the honest approach to detective work. People believed in it. In Webb. Even policemen believed.

One time, Webb had his mind on some story problems, and he inadvertently passed a red light. A motorcycle cop sirened him to a stop. He asked where he was going in such a hurry. Then he

saw the face. He did a big take. He shook his head. "Sergeant Friday," he said, "how could you? You, of all people!"

Meanwhile, Julie and he were drawing further apart. You can't work 14 hours a day on *Dragnet* and be a good husband and father. You can't make *Dragnet* what it is unless you give yourself to it body and soul. It was a terrible wrench when the final break came.

He sees his beautiful daughters as often as he can. He still cares deeply for Julie. He wishes things could have been different. But that's the way they work out sometimes. They both tried.

She would say, "Can't we go away for two weeks? Alone. Just the two of us. Someplace where nobody knows you're Sergeant Friday. Just us. Catch up with ourselves."

He couldn't. The program was a Frankenstein monster he had created which swallowed him up. Maybe he was married to *Dragnet*. That's the way it is. A hundred hours of work goes into each 30 minutes of *Dragnet*.

There have been rumors that Webb is going to quit *Dragnet*. Let another actor play Friday. Never. He says nobody else but Webb will ever play Friday. What he is afraid is he might go stale playing the same character. He has done 104 TV shows plus the movies.

But as soon as he feels that the *Dragnet* idea is exhausted, he is going to move on. He doesn't want to stand still.

He's got a wonderful idea, *Pete Kelly's Blues*, the story of a hot cornet player during Prohibition. He's already got his own seven-piece Dixieland combination which has been rehearsing for a long time. He wants to play Pete Kelly.

No, he's not quitting. He feels a deep loyalty to his audience. To entertain them. To make them think. To make them see. To make them feel. If he can't manage to do it with Pete Kelly, he knows he'll do it with some other character. He has a lot of characters in his mind, characters he's been storing up since those days when he was a sick and lonely child staring out of a third story window in a slum tenement in downtown Los Angeles.

THE END